

VIII THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH AND THREE HIGHER TRAININGS

The traditional teachings tell us that the results we are looking for are two things: *nyun du dang gehlek*, which means the temporary result and the permanent result. *Nyun du*, the temporary result, refers to the life we will take in the near future, or from tomorrow onwards. The temporary result we seek is a good life, within this lifetime as well as in our immediate future lives. And *gehlek* is the ultimate goal—total and permanent liberation or freedom. These are the two main goals that we have. Our goal is not to become multi-millionaires. Nor is our goal to become hippies or yuppies. Our goal is to have permanent liberation or a good life this time or in future lives. These are our two main cessations.

How are we going to get there? There are many ways. One way of looking at the path to these goals is through the three most important things:

1. Morality
2. Concentration
3. Wisdom

These three are called the “three basket teachings” of the Buddha, or three fundamentals, or Three Higher Trainings. People will give you all kinds of names, but just remember these three things. The path that leads to those two goals consists of these three, okay?

Morality

Number one is morality, which is absolutely important. Morality is the fundamental basis of functioning. If your morality is totally wrong or out the window, and you think you’re a great meditator, you might as well follow your morality and jump out of the window, too. That’s very important. Buddha himself said:

Gelong da song da che long do sho do long.

It is easy to die while protecting your morality. It is not easy to live with broken morality.

Why? If you die to protect your morality, that will simply end this life, but it will be the beginning of your good future lives. But to die with broken morality is the

beginning of hundreds of thousands of lives of suffering.

The ways we understand morality may differ. That is a totally different issue. But thinking that morality is not important and that wisdom and compassion are more important than morality is very wrong. Absolutely wrong! In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, any vow is based on the refuge vow. Without the refuge vow, no one can obtain any other vow at all. So refuge is the basis of all vows. And vows are the basis of morality. Morality is basically keeping our vows.

Today, everybody would like to write their own vows, but originally, vows were given by Buddha, though he did not pick up the pen and paper and write them down. The vows came from Buddha because of incidents that took place. Buddha did not sit down and get a pencil in hand and start shaking his leg and thinking, "What do I write next?" Buddha didn't do that. It is not like you people crossing your legs and shaking your legs and putting the pencil in your mouth and taking notes. Buddha didn't do that.

Every vow that came up in the Buddhist tradition is based on incidents that took place. Buddha gave commitments. Some crazy, naughty guy would do something strange, and everybody would think, "What is that funny behavior? Can we do this? Is that okay?" And then Buddha would say "yes" or "no" and give explanations why. That is how the vows have built up. For example, if you are a fully ordained *bikshu* (fully ordained monk) you have two hundred and fifty-three vows. And if you are novice, you have thirty-six. If you are an *upasaka* (holder of lay vows) you have five, or four, or three, or two, or one.

All these vows have come up because of incidents that took place. Each time a vow came up, they would say, "If you do this, it will be a downfall of this category or that category." For example, there is a category of downfalls that are not so bad; it is sort of the lowest category and includes quite a lot. And then, the next category is a little more serious, and so on. It goes like: "Well, this is of the second category from the top, and the twelve of those come into it. We're not supposed to do five of this and twelve of that."

And then comes the category of the four things that you absolutely cannot do. This is the dangerous area. "*Thou shall not kill*" is a commandment even in the Western, Judeo-Christian tradition. I don't mean "even" in the sense of looking down, just that the Buddha says the same thing. He also says: "*Thou shall not lie*." That refers to telling a black lie. Also, *you can't engage in sexual misconduct*. And *you can't take away things that don't belong to you*. Those four are the fundamental basis of morality.

Killing in this case probably refers only to human beings. Animal killings are not in the category of those four, but come down a little bit lower—not because human beings are more important than animals, but because human life may have more

value than animal life. Some people may not like this, but I think it is reality. A number of people used to tell me, “My pets are very intelligent, more intelligent than me.” I say, “Fine! Then give your cat your car keys and send it to buy cat food at the supermarket!” Although our pets are very intelligent and wonderful, and all lives basically have equal value, there is a slight difference here.

Why is a human life more important than a pet’s life? People will raise objections to that and their objections are valid and well taken. But we cannot make a pet’s life equal to a human life. It’s as simple as that. Political parties can do it. That doesn’t matter. They can get a couple more votes, or they may lose fewer votes if they say that. That’s their goal. Our goal is ultimate joy, the joy that has never known suffering, or at least a good life this time and in the next future life. It doesn’t matter whether you lose a few votes; it absolutely doesn’t matter. Here killing means killing a human being. So, those four are the basic principles.

Then, there is another vow against intoxication. Intoxication is good language; it covers everything from alcohol to drugs. Whatever you can think of is covered within that rule. Traditionally, if you read it literally, you hear about alcohol, not drugs, because there may not have been drugs at that time. See, I told you, all those vows developed because of incidents. During the Buddha’s period, there must have been mushrooms. But maybe the mushroom didn’t bother them. We’re not making new rules here. They sure didn’t have those mind-altering drugs, like those little pills, Ecstasy and LSD and so on. I’m sure they didn’t have those. If an incident had taken place with those, Buddha would have spoken.

But just before Buddha died, he took off his clothes and called everybody and said, “Look at the body of the Tathagata, the One Gone Beyond.” And he said, “This is your last chance to look. You won’t see it again.” Then he said, “So far, you people have been asking me. I have given you guidance. From now on, he said *kashi rol a dup te...*”

If there is something you don’t know what to do about that we have not spoken of, then if it goes closer to those cases about which we have said, “one can do it,” and does not go against those we have agreed, “one cannot do it,” then consider it as “one can do it” and put it under the category of “can do.” And visa versa, the other way around: If it goes closer to those cases about which we have said “one cannot do it” and goes against those about which we said, “one can do it,” then consider it as “one cannot do it.”

That is how Buddha left it for us to use our great intelligence to make our own decisions.

In that way he actually gives us the room to write our own vows, too. That’s why I do not object to people writing their own marriage vows. Not only do I not object, I

welcome them writing their own vows. We do have that. That is because Buddha gives the room, and no one is going to say in their vows, "I'm going to hurt you. I take the vow to hurt you." The other will say, "I will do the same!" They're never going to say that; there's no doubt about it. So you can let people write whatever they want to, and it's their own vow anyway.

Basically, that's how the Buddha gives us directions. Looking in that way, you will see that Ecstasy or LSD fall in the same category as alcohol because they alter your mind. And so that's how we have to understand and take the vows. The *vinaya* (monks' rules) will tell you, "Don't take even a drop of alcohol on the tip of a blade of grass." But that rule is followed very strictly only by people who have taken the *vinaya* vows, like monks and nuns. Apart from that, the objection to intoxicants really rises when they alter your mind. That is the real objection to major alcohol intake. So if you take alcohol and it doesn't alter your mind, fine. But if you still think, "I'm fine!" when you are dead drunk, then that is not okay. We must draw a line over there, honestly.

Basically, for us, there are the ten moralities or ten virtues. We're going to talk in detail about these in our series *The Inner World of Mind*. The ten virtues are the opposite, or antidote, of the ten negativities. These ten negativities are the ones you really have to be careful of in terms of morality. That's what we're talking about. As Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, we always say "Three by body, four by speech, three by mind." [body: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; speech: lying, slandering, harsh speech, idle gossip; mind: coveting, hatred, and wrong views] We always confess and purify. We've been taught that as kids. We can say it from our tongue all the time. These are the ten negativities, and their opposites, the ten virtues. From the positive point of view and from the negative point of view, basic morality is this.

Concentration

The second of the Three Higher Trainings is concentration. Concentration means focusing, meditating. If you don't concentrate, nothing works well. Even at an ordinary level, if your mind is very well trained, you can do three or four or ten different things together. Sometimes if you are with a well-trained lawyer, it looks like things are not coming together. They seem all messed up. The lawyer is talking this, talking that, doing this, doing that, taking notes. But when they have a minute, they put things together and present a very well set-up case. A trained mind can do that. With an untrained mind, if you concentrate on this, you cannot think that. If you concentrate on that, you cannot think this.

Meditation is not only available on the spiritual path, but also in our normal Western education. They don't call it "meditation"; they call it "studying." How many subjects do you take? What about algebra, languages, geography, global studies, all

this? It's training the mind to be able to focus on different things simultaneously or next to each other. That is the first way of focusing and concentrating, even on the spiritual path. Then, you can specialize in certain things, go deeper, and zoom in. The same thing happens on the spiritual path. When you focus, when you specialize, you can go much deeper. And when you go deeper, you gain more clarity.

If you don't have clarity, when you go deeper, it all goes "whooooo." It is like putting ink onto a piece of paper. When the concentration is wrong, the paper absorbs the ink and it disperses everywhere. The more you focus, the better the clarity should be. Somebody with a beautiful handwriting will take a nice pen and write a letter and it becomes beautiful, clear, and wonderful. Because of that concentration, you can see all of the words clearly. But if you do it like me, you take a pen and scribble all over the place, with the wrong spelling, and you end up with a dirty mess! Really, true! So focusing or concentration has to bring clarity. The clarity confirms the concentration.

During the *Gom* teachings, we said very clearly, when you're thinking and focusing carefully, you look at a pillar and gain the confidence to be able to see each and every particle within that pillar, or within that bowl, or within that glass, or within this flower. I don't mean the petals or leaves. I mean each and every particle within them. That is the clarity we are talking about.

Concentration is not sleepiness, not like being drunk. Concentration is neither high, nor low. Concentration is clarity. If your concentration does not bring clarity, something's wrong with it. If you concentrate for five minutes, two hours, two days, one week, and still there is no clarity, don't worry. You have not spent enough time. But if you spend months and years and there is no clarity, then you do worry. Then you have to look back. Something's wrong.

The ultimate concentration is described in the seventeen focusing levels. There are seventeen stages of concentration, which indicate how far you can go and what you can reach. The seventeenth stage reaches to the peak of the samsara, which is the ultimate concentration. But Buddha told us that concentrating at that level is not necessary in order to achieve our goal. It is fine; you can go and concentrate, do whatever, but you don't have to go to the peak of samsara. If you do, even though you reach the peak of samsara, even then your suffering is not exhausted. Something happens, and you fall back.

A great Indian anti-Buddhist master, who later became a Buddhist scholar, praised Buddha. He said that in some traditions, people go up to the peak of samsara, yet their power of concentration is eventually exhausted, and something happens. There is an example: A person is sitting in meditation for centuries and eons. Their hair has grown so much that rats or mice start eating their hair. When they eventually notice, they become angry, die, and fall back to samsara and the

circle of life. Then this person praises Buddha and says, “But your followers, although you did not reach the actual stage of the true meditation level, you have reached the necessary prerequisite level, and so you can pluck the eyeball out of samsara.”

Like Bill did in *Kill Bill*, a movie I saw the day before yesterday. Bill picks up the eyeball with one little Kung Fu effect, and it was just like that, taking the eyeball out of samsara. That was the praise by an outstanding non-Buddhist meditator, the greatest master they had at that time. Later, he became Buddha’s follower. The level of concentration that he called “the necessary prerequisite level” is what we call *shamatha*. So Buddha recommended that we develop our concentration up to the level of shamatha. It is absolutely necessary, if you want to get out samsara. Without that, you cannot do it.

That level is also called *nyer to mi jo me*, which means “the first meditation stage’s prerequisite”—that one cannot do without. Then, the moment you reach shamatha, instead of continuing with that meditation, switch to meditation on wisdom, and that is what takes the eyeball out of samsara. This is how you can overpower samsara, the circle of suffering, the continuation of suffering. That is the concentration we are talking about.

Wisdom

The third Higher Training is wisdom. We have talked about wisdom so many times. Generally wisdom is knowledge. Knowing is wisdom. Everything, even knowing how to read, is wisdom; knowing how to write is wisdom. I don’t have that wisdom in English. I know how to read and write Tibetan, but I can’t read and write English. Anything that goes against not knowing or wrong knowing is knowledge and, therefore, is wisdom.

However, here we are not referring to every wisdom, every knowledge. We’re referring very specifically to the knowledge that understands the true nature of reality. We’re talking about that wisdom, not any other wisdom. We’re talking about the wisdom of knowing the nature of reality—the reality of our life, the reality of our self, the reality of the individual, the reality of the group, the reality of society, the reality of phenomena, the reality of existence. That’s what we’re talking about, not just education.

What is that wisdom? It is the skill that Kill Bill needed to take the eyeball out with seemingly no effort, suddenly. That is the skill. As Nagarjuna said, *tenzin so ba di gyi* . . .

Even raising a doubt alone tears samsara into pieces.

That is the wisdom we’re talking about, even raising a doubt alone. If the doubt

alone can do that much, what will actual wisdom do when we gain that? It is almost unimaginable. We will truly know reality, which is the interdependent nature of existence. We call it emptiness.

What is the essence of emptiness? The essence of emptiness is interdependence. In the prayer of meeting the teaching of Tsongkhapa, it says:

dong da je de . . .

From emptiness one sees, finds, discovers, realizes interdependence. From interdependence one sees, finds, discovers, realizes emptiness.

dong do cha de gye de . . .

It is empty in nature, yet, we can establish every functioning, everything, as it is.

What we see every day exists. We can establish that within emptiness. That is the real beauty of Nagarjuna's presentation, which has been made easy to understand by the great Je Tsongkhapa. That's why from Tsongkhapa onwards, everybody prays in that way, because that understanding is the real wisdom.

The essence of emptiness is interdependence. The essence of interdependence is emptiness. One projects the other. One helps us to perceive the other. One's meaning is the other. The meaning of interdependence is emptiness. The meaning of emptiness is interdependence. Yet, we can establish everything as it is functioning, everything as it is. That is the beauty. That's how you overcome the extremes of nihilism and existentialism. Freedom from these two extremes becomes the central point.

When you ask, "What is this emptiness we are talking about?" emptiness will come out and show you that because causes and conditions are right, everything functions, everything exists. That is the essence of interdependence. Interdependence means causes and conditions coming together, functioning, happening, going, sitting, standing, walking, talking, thinking, eating, shitting—sorry! Yet, when you investigate deeper, there is nothing—nothing beyond that. There is only the functioning level, nothing beyond that. That's what emptiness is all about. The essence of emptiness is interdependence, and because everything is interdependent, there is nothing else. Because of dependent relationships, everything functions. This is a very subtle point, through which we can have everything functioning. Go, sit, drink, throw-up—everything is functioning as it is.

That's why the ordinary eye and ordinary ear and ordinary person's perceptions are not wrong, because they accord with reality. I'm fat; you are thin. It's reality. Okay, I'm fat, so search for the fat. There's no one thing called "fat." It's all these fats

together, which combine in my body, which are sort of put together with the skin so that you get a fat person. If I have liposuction, take the fat out, then one condition for me to be called fat is gone. The liposuction sucked it out. Then I'm no longer called fat, because the condition has been altered. When the conditions are right, causes happen, and it is real.

When our body is able to host our consciousness, we call that life. Conditions are right. If something goes wrong so that the body is unable to host consciousness, then it ceases to be alive and becomes a dead body. It is still the same old thing; you're looking at it, except it doesn't move anymore, doesn't speak anymore, doesn't look at you, doesn't function, doesn't acknowledge, but it is the same physical thing. That is the working of the conditions. Just the combination of life, consciousness, the physical conditions, makes it function. We can smile, we can make jokes, we can walk, we can talk—all this. Conditions are just right.

When you go beyond that, you don't have anything. Let's say you find something called consciousness and are able to capture it. Professor Ray Kurtweil told me he's going to capture consciousness one day and put it in a computer. That's how he's going to establish artificial intelligence. If you could capture a consciousness, let's say it happens to be my consciousness, I could say, "It's me!" But you will all say, "No, no, no, it's not you. You look like this, you look like that, you think that way. It's not you!" But it could be, because conditions change. That's what it is. That's the truth. It is such a subtle matter, such a subtle matter. And when you realize it, when you gain that understanding and realize it, you begin to see that everything is transitory. Not only is everything transitory, everything is alterable; everything is changeable. You can do whatever you want to do.

Without spiritual development, even scientifically, you can search for interdependence and you will be able to find it, in my opinion. We're not there yet scientifically, but all these string theories—they put paper through the walls! Why? Because you see the separation between the particles. I know nothing about quantum physics. (Audience laughter) I know the first verse. I'm lacking the physics aspects of it. Anyway, when you can't trace it, at a certain level, you can't trace it. Then, at a certain level, you find it; you pick it up. It's no news for Buddha. Honestly. It is no news for Buddha. Not only just Buddha, but for anybody who realizes reality, who has wisdom. It's no news.

That is the wisdom we are talking about. What does that wisdom do? A powerful, sharp mind will not provide the fundamental basis on which we create negative emotions. That will totally be destroyed, completely eradicated from our system, from our universe. It won't be there. Because it is wrong. Because it is not truth. When you get to the truth, untruth gets burst. And that is the wisdom, the third aspect of the path that Buddha is talking about, the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

One, Two, Three; ABC

So now we have all three aspects: morality, concentration, and wisdom. If you don't have morality, you will not gain concentration. And when there is no concentration, you will not gain wisdom, because you won't be able to see that much. It is a little bit beyond our ordinary capacity. Like the scientist who has to depend on gadgets to be able to discover more, we have to depend on the mental gadget that is called focusing. With that concentration power, we are able to see reality. So these three are interconnected, ABC. Together, they are the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the path that leads to cessation.

This Fourth Noble Truth—one, two, three; ABC; morality, concentration, and wisdom—applies to our daily practice. In your daily practice, whether you're doing the Jewel Heart prayers, whether you're doing sadhanas, whether you're doing mantras, whether you're doing circumambulations, prostrations, or mandala offerings, you should have these three things as the essence of your practice. When you have that, you have the path that leads to cessation. If you don't have them, then you don't have it. So, daily practice is extremely important. All of these, one, two, three, should be included in it. Have discipline, concentrate, and apply wisdom within your practice. That is how we have to spend our life. That way, we can live with cessation, we can sleep with cessation, we can die with cessation, and we can be reborn with cessation.

The Fourth Noble Truth and Om Mani Padme Hung

I'd like to do something funny here. I thought I'd provide OM MANI PADME HUM as an explanation of the Fourth Noble Truth. It is a Tibetan mantra, and people say it all the time.

The first is OM. That is the truth, too, because OM is Ah-Oh-M together. Just Ah alone doesn't make OM: Ah alone makes "Ah, Ah, Ah," and O alone makes "Ooo." When you say Oh, there's a light in there, and it becomes Ah. Actually, it is like Allen (Ginsberg) writes, "Ah and then O and M." So Ah makes the Ah alive in the mantra, and O and M combined together make OM.

So, what does that mean? Body, mind, and speech. Body is the physical-mental body. Mind is the mental-emotional mind. Speech is sound, whatever we produce. So Ah-Oh-M together represents the body, mind, and speech of the individual practitioner, or perfect Buddha, or perfect Avalokiteshvara—let's call it the Buddha of Compassion.

Ah-Oh-M: OM really means pure body: the ordinary body becomes a pure body. Ordinary speech becomes pure speech. Ordinary mind becomes pure mind, right? That is Ah-Oh-M's meaning.

How do ordinary body, speech, and mind become what we technically call Vajra

body, Vajra speech, and Vajra mind? *Vajra* here means “indestructible,” “diamond-like.” But, what makes our body perfect? It is the result of the practice of our ethical activities. The cause is really the moral and ethical aspects of the path; keeping our commitments through the body such as avoiding killing, hurting people, and all of that. Out of ten non-virtuous actions, there are three by body, so keeping those commitments pure makes the ordinary body become an extraordinary body, a Vajra body.

Similarly, Vajra speech is the result of not slandering, not telling a black lie, etc. Out of ten negativities, we have four by speech. By maintaining and ethically observing those commitments, ordinary speech becomes perfect speech. Mind also has three negativities and maintaining those commitments properly makes the individual’s mind become a pure mind.

So OM gives you the message of Vajra body, Vajra mind, and Vajra speech, which means absolute, ethical perfection from the body point of view, the speech point of view, and the mind point of view. So, keeping all perfect ethics. We’ve got that straight, right?

Now, second is Mani. *Mani* is the “wish-fulfilling jewel.” That is compassion—ultimate, unconditional, unlimited compassion, or just ordinary, helpful compassion. Compassion is wish-fulfilling; compassion fulfills the wishes of suffering people. Suffering people wish to be free from suffering. Compassionate ones will work for it, help with it, give support for it, bring it. That’s why *Mani* is compassion.

Now Padme, in Tibetan or Sanskrit, is a lotus, which stands for purity. Purity is wisdom. Wisdom may be grown out of ego. However, when you “get” wisdom, it is absolutely pure. So the lotus and Padme (or “Peme” as Tibetans pronounce it) gives you the idea of wisdom.

Now the path, the Fourth Noble Truth. What do I need to do for me to have freedom, the cessation of all suffering? That cessation of suffering comes about by following the path of ethics, compassion, and wisdom. These are the three basket teachings of the Buddha or the Three Higher Trainings of the Buddha. Truly, when you say OM MANI PADME HUM you have all three of them together. However, when you don’t know, you are just saying OM MANI PADME HUM, and I don’t think it becomes the Fourth Noble Truth. That is the bad part about it. The good news is, it’s there. The bad news is, we need to put in effort. Really, true. Because you have to have an idea of what it’s all about, an idea of how it works.

So that’s the OM MANI PADME HUM as an explanation of the Fourth Noble Truth. I never heard anybody do it. I may have cooked it up. However, I didn’t cook up something wrong. The Three Higher Trainings is the path they give. I never heard

anybody put that into OM MANI PADME HUM, but the explanation of MANI PADME is exactly compassion and wisdom, and OM is Vajra body, Vajra mind, and Vajra speech, which is the result of ethical activities. So, OM MANI PADME HUM includes the Three Higher Trainings of the Buddha's teaching and the Sutra and Tantra aspects of the path all combined together, and it's very simple to say. But you have to think about it.

Then the Vajrayana part of it. You know that OM is the “jewel mantra,” right? What makes it a jewel? The purity of body, mind, and speech. Then HUM (HUNG) is “union”—the union of the ordinary body, mind, speech of me, the layperson or practitioner, and the extraordinary body, mind, speech of the enlightened ones, in this case, Avalokiteshvara or the Buddha of compassion. *Union* means “oneness.” The true union is not just two separate things coming together. We call it [sexual] union, and we see it everywhere, every thangka with the famous *yab-yum* business. Even every advertisement has it. But the true union is oneness. Oneness means inseparable. Inseparable means it is compassion, but in its essence, it is wisdom. Wisdom, in essence, is compassion; nothing separates them. Are you with me?

That is important; that is why we call the ultimate enlightenment level the “union of body and mind.” Mind is wisdom and body is compassion, and their oneness is true union. At the Buddha level, Buddha's body is Buddha's mind, and Buddha's mind is Buddha's body. There is no separation; it is oneness. That is true union.

It is not that the male and female become a union; it is not that way. Sometimes people think that the male and female joined together becomes a Buddha. No, it doesn't; it becomes oneness. The union should really be oneness, with no separation. If your body and mind becomes oneness, that is a great achievement. That is true union. All these deities in *yab-yum* form, all of them are supposed to be symbolic of oneness. You know the thangkas we see all the time where it looks like the deities are having sex all the time, twenty-four hours a day? It looks like they're standing there doing it, but they're not. It is a symbol of the oneness of no separation. That is what true union is all about. That is the body-mind combination or method-wisdom combination. It means wisdom and compassion together, oneness. You know, you hear all the time:

tong nyi nying je nying po che

That means, “the essence of wisdom is compassion.”

We also have it in the *Migtsema*:

Mig me tse wei ter chen chen re zig

Mig me is the wisdom aspect of it; *tse we ter chen chen re zig* is referring to Avalokiteshvara, which is the essence of compassion. So wisdom and compassion are combined together.

dri me kyen pai wang po jam pel yang

The faultlessness of having no self-cherishing selfishness and the wisdom of Manjushri are combined together. So each one of those lines combines compassion and wisdom.

*Mig me tse wei ter chen chen re zig
dri me kyen pai wang po jam pel yang
dü pung ma lü jom dze sang wei dak*

That is the power button, the first two lines.

The last two are:

*gang chen ke pei tsug gyan tzung ka pa
lo zang drag pai zhab la sol wa deb*

That means “crown jewel of Tibetan sages.” But the first two lines really give you that.

So, in essence no matter whatever you do, wherever you look, wherever you may come from, the Eightfold Path or the Thirty-seven Wings of Enlightenment, or whatever it may be, the real essence of the dharma, or the Buddha’s experience through which he experienced the joy that has never known suffering, is through these three ways: the Three Higher Trainings or three baskets teachings. Being ethical, or morality, really counts, and it makes a difference. Morality alone will not do anything; it needs wisdom. Ethics and wisdom together can liberate an individual, but you won’t be able to help that much, so you need compassion. Three major things, wisdom, compassion, and morality, combined together make the perfect Fourth Noble Truth.

Now, let me go back to draw out the conclusion a little bit more. What happened is that we introduced you first to suffering. We even talked about Buddha discovering suffering in the literal sense in that he was going out of the palace and seeing suffering. All of that we mentioned. We also raised the question, where does suffering come from? Is it from nowhere? Are you just born to suffer? Did somebody give this suffering to you? What is it? Is it just from one single source? We delved into quite a lot of detail about that.

The Fourth Noble Truth and Karma

Now look at it from the karmic point of view. That is my other job description for today. Karma is something that we always talk about, but how much do we really know about it? Sometimes people think you're bound to suffer because it's your karma. It's sort of a predestined suffering that one has to endure. That's not true. Karma has characteristics, and these are basically four things:

1. First, karma is definite. What does that mean? If we created any karma, the karmic result, positive or negative, is bound to take place. That's really what karma is definite means. There's no free play in there. It's sort of straightforward and clear-cut.
2. The second characteristic is that *karma is fast growing*. It doubles and triples and quadruples. The karmic system is such that it goes that way. So that's why karma is labeled as fast growing.
3. Then the third and fourth characteristics are almost the same as the first. *One never meets a karmic result if you have not created the cause*; that's the third.
4. Fourth is if you created the cause, no matter how long it takes, you are bound to meet the result.

The essence of karma is really the Second Noble Truth and the Fourth Noble Truth. If we create a karmic cause, good or bad, it builds up, and when the time comes, it gives you the good or bad result. I create negative karma, and that brings suffering. That is the Second Noble Truth bringing the First Noble Truth. I create positive karma, and that brings cessation. That is the Fourth Noble Truth bringing the Third Noble Truth. Basically, what Buddha discovered is this. The principal of karma, bottom line, boiled down: if you do something good, a good thing happens to you; if you do something bad, a bad thing happens to you. That is the bottom line.

One should never look at karma as bad alone because there is very good karma, too. That is why the enlightened ones always have the joy that has never known suffering. Because they do not create the cause of suffering at all, they always have the joy that has never known suffering.

Why do ordinary people have suffering constantly, one pain after the other, added up? It is because we continuously create the causes of suffering. As Nagarjuna said:

dan ke go ing she de su gen so don yo

You are your own leader. No one can be your leader

In other words, you are responsible for yourself; no one else is responsible. I am responsible for me; I am my leader. It is up to me; I decide where I'm going and what

I'm going to do. I do it. In other words, my life and my karma are my own responsibility.

Karma doesn't mean anything mysterious. Any action that we take has mental components. Physical actions follow from mental actions. Mind has been pushed by our emotions, positive and negative. Mind makes us to do mental and physical things, good and bad, right and wrong. The moment we take an action, we create karma. If we take a complete action, we have a complete karma. If we take a half-action, then we have a half-karma. Even a half-karma works, fortunately or unfortunately.

So karma means nothing more than action, mental, physical, or both. Mind alone can create karma. If you keep on sitting here trying to meditate, trying to be nice, and all the time keep on killing somebody in your mind, even though you didn't kill anyone, the thought of killing and even visualizing killing creates a killing karma—not a complete karma, it's incomplete, but yes, it's a killing karma, because of the mind power.

Similarly, we can sit here doing nothing and visualize that we are offering the best we have. We can think that the entire universe is being filled up by the greatest offerings ever possible. Thinking that way is also creating a karma. You're doing nothing, just being a couch potato and sitting here on a big thick cushion, yet you're creating the karma of offering because of your mental actions. In addition to that, if you put a glass of water or a warm candlelight [on the altar], then your offering is both actually arranged and mentally created. Actually, we cannot fill the universe up at all, but mentally we can always fill it up. That creates karma, just the thought of it. Plus, if you say the words, speech is involved. Plus, if you fold your hands or do something physical, it brings in the body, mind, and speech, all three combined together, which makes the karma stronger and more powerful. It works the same way with negativities, too.

That is what karma is all about. It is the karmic principle of the Four Noble Truths. I'm glad I have these two things to talk about together today, honestly. That's really what it is. And that's why we're responsible for our deeds and why we can help ourselves or harm ourselves. That's why we are our own leader. No one else can impose anything on us if we did not create the karma. The characteristic of karma is such that if you did not create the cause, the whole world may crash on you, but nothing will happen to you because you don't have that karma. So that makes the individual responsible for himself or herself. That is very important here.

Some people have the opposite idea. They think that because everything is caused by karma, you can do nothing about it and just have to wait for the karmic judgment. Thinking that way is stupid, honestly! Why stupid? Because karma is a dependant arising, remember? Anything, everything, is a dependent arising. It

depends on conditions, whatever conditions we provide for our good and bad karma to connect.

Sometimes that looks strange. It seems like we're bringing our original karma from our previous lives into this one. It's like this cloth. When the cloth was knitted, you have these big main threads that you put in, right? That is like our karma, the original one. Then you have the side threads that go in here and there and make it look nice. Those are the conditions. When the conditions are right, they meet with the main thread, and exactly this type of fabric is produced.

Knowing that now, just briefly having the idea of what karma is, a question rises here. In one statement I said *karma is definite* and in another I said *karma is a dependant arising*. You may think these statements are contradictory, but they're not. That question was raised to Buddha, and Buddha gave the answer that it is not a contradiction. What *definite* means is that once the karmic result has started, until it has finished, one can do nothing. Before the karmic result has matured, we have every room to play, because karma's ripening depends on the conditions. Conditions are what we provide. Though I can control my karma, a very specific karma that has started giving a result cannot be controlled, because it has become definite. I have lost the control of that particular karma.

Does this confuse you more? Probably. Let me repeat it: I created my karma. Without me creating my karma, nothing happens to me. I create negative karma, and that brings suffering. I create positive karma, and that brings cessation. So, it is me who is actually making it. But once the karmic result has started, you can't say, "No, no, no, I don't want it, I want to change it at the last minute and switch it over!" But you can't do it, because at that point, you don't have control. You can't do it, because the result has already started, the mechanism is already in gear, it is functioning, and one can't stop it. That's what "karma is definite" means.

What you can do is try to make it go fast and end quickly, by creating different conditions. That's why purification, accumulation of merit, every practice that people do has an effect, has a purpose, and helps. That is the reason.

Basically our life, whatever it is, whatever we're experiencing now individually, collectively, is all our creation. There is something called collective karma, too. So it is our own; we are experiencing what we did. Good—we deserve it; we did it. Bad—we did it; we're responsible.

Remember that early Hindu-Buddhist mythological story? There are five hundred Buddhists, royal family ladies. All of them have achieved the magical power of being able to fly. Their palace catches on fire. The queen, whoever she is, thinks about it and realizes it is karma for them to have to die. It is a sort of dying karma for them in this fire in the house. She makes a statement saying, "If you don't honor your own karma, who else will?" So she jumps into the fire. Then, all five hundred ladies jump

into the fire, and they all burn up.

Now their attendant is an old lady, a hunchback or something. She has no power to fly or anything. So what she does is jump into the toilet! She crawls out through the toilet and escapes.

So people went and talked to Buddha. Buddha gave, as is always the case, long stories for each of these five hundred ladies in which he said this and that thing happened [that explains why they had the karma to die in the fire.] The Buddha's thing is explaining what had happened. Almost all Buddhist rules and ethical points come out by Buddha explaining what had happened, because he never sat down and wrote out "you can't do this and you can't do that." He never did. He explained everything on the basis of incidents.

So the karmic thing here is funny. Those five hundred queens can fly, yet they have to die in the fire, and one old lady who has no magical powers jumps through the toilet and crawls out and is saved. That is how karma functions. Funny, yet it is very hard to understand.

Buddha himself said, "It is easier to gain wisdom than to understand the details of karmic functioning." One can guess. Grossly, good deeds bring good result, and bad deeds bring bad results. On the gross level, we can make a judgment, but on the subtle level, we can never make a judgment. For that reason, Buddha insists that people don't judge other people.

na nam dna ka ga tsu
nam men du ta ra

Unless you are fully enlightened person, do not make judgments of another person. You can guess (laughs). I guess he's a good person; I guess he's a bad person. You cannot judge people, because this karmic thing is so tricky, and you will never know for sure.

Summary and Conclusion

So what did we talk about today? What we did was basically follow the earlier talks on the Four Noble Truths. Today we followed with the last two truths: cessation and the path that brings cessation to us. Into that we brought the Three Higher Trainings of mind: ethics, compassion, and wisdom. These are the three keys that we can use for our life, and we conduct our lives on that basis.

The result of them, particularly of ethics, is the karmic point. The result is what we were talking about as Vajra body, Vajra speech, and Vajra mind—the totally enlightened levels of body, speech, and mind. The ordinary body produces the result of the perfect Vajra body as a result of practice and meditation on compassion. Perfect mind is the result of practice and meditation on wisdom. The combination,

joining them together, is the result of morality. Basically, keep these three as a guideline for your life. Ask yourself, "Is it morally okay? Is it a compassionate action? Is it wise?" If you keep these things as a key in your everyday life, you can never go wrong, honestly. If you have a problem with one of those, then you constantly have difficulties.

That is the Fourth Noble Truth and that is the cause that brings the joy that has never known suffering. That's how we can lead our life. The other choice is allowing negative emotions to control you. Act according to the directions of the negative emotions and negative mind, and you will have constant suffering, continuously! That is karma combined together with the Four Noble Truths, combined together with OM MANI PADME HUM. That is how it works, okay?

Now, one more thing I have to tell you: the purpose of talking about the Four Noble Truths.

What is the purpose of talking so much about the First Noble Truth of suffering? It is to know, to acknowledge, and to recognize.

What is the purpose of talking about the Second Noble Truth? It is to avoid what causes us suffering, not to entertain it.

What is the purpose of talking about the Third Noble Truth? It is cessation, the introduction of the goal and purpose of your life. It tells you what you can achieve.

What is the purpose of talking about the Fourth Noble Truth? It shows you how to practice. Practice is not just sitting down to meditate some place, rolling your eyes. You don't have to push your mala around. You don't have to. Practice really means conducting your mind and your body simply, nicely, functioning properly, and thinking about all these points.

The absolute truth is to recognize suffering, but there is nothing to be recognized. Yes, you have to avoid the cause of suffering, yet there is nothing to be avoided. Yes, you have to obtain cessation, yet there is nothing to be obtained. We're talking about the wisdom of emptiness, right? Yes, you have to meditate on the path, but there is nothing to be meditated on, there is no meditator, there is no meditation, and there is no path. It's all empty, right?

So the Four Noble Truths have to be understood three times: In the first round, we are introduced to the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path to cessation.

In the second round, suffering is to be recognized, the cause of suffering is to be

avoided, cessation is your goal, what you want to obtain, and the path is where and how you reach your goal.

The third round is wisdom. Yes, you recognize suffering, but there is nothing to be recognized. You avoid the causes of suffering, but there is nothing to be avoided. Cessation is what you want to obtain, yet there is nothing to be obtained, and the path shows you how to obtain cessation, yet there is no path to walk.

Thus Buddha actually taught the Four Noble Truths three times for three different purposes. That's why you have the Four Noble Truths, three circles, and twelve points. Not just four truths, but four, plus four, plus four, to make a circle of twelve.

That's it, that's how you conduct your life. That's how we live and that's what it really is. Keep that principle in your life, and then whatever you have to do, you have to do, and whatever you don't have to do, you don't have to do. The good things come in; the bad things come in. When the good things come in, it's nothing to be very excited about. When the bad things come in, it's not so much to be sad about, because the reality is, we're living in samsara. That is samsara's nature and that's why we want to get out of samsara. We want to get into nirvana and be pure. That's what it is. Whatever happens in your life, take it as it comes. If many great and wonderful things happen, that's nothing to be excited about because it can go any minute. It can take just a second for everything to go. If something bad happens, you can't worry about it so much, either, because it will change any minute.

In principle, keep compassion as morally clean and apply wisdom. That's actually how you live your life and become very nice and happy. When anything bad happens, when you experience pain and misery, you can think, "By my having this pain, may that substitute for all living beings having any pain. I will pray, and I wish that this pain may substitute for everybody who has to suffer." That is how you can think about it. If good things happen to you, also give it and share it with the people.

Make life simple, good, pure, and nice. If you live that way, nothing can go wrong. By the time you actually have to go, you can go with dignity and nicely. There will be somebody else who will open the door and say, "welcome."

Questions and Answers

Audience: I thought you said that the Three Higher Trainings were morality, concentration, and wisdom?

Rimpoche: You are right, absolutely right. Morality, concentration and wisdom, but what are you concentrating on? Compassion. Why not? Honestly, you don't want to concentrate on your girlfriend's face. So the subject of your meditation, of your concentration, is compassion.

Audience: Let's say that when I do something positive, I get a positive result. So what's the difference between the action that creates the karmic result and the action that creates the conditions? Are these different kinds of action?

Rimpoche: Very good question. Yes, they are. I didn't think I had time to go into that. Karma has a lot of sub-divisions. Basically there's karma that creates life, karma that runs life, and karma that completes life. There's one more, but I don't remember just now. But anyway, to start with, there is one specific karma that creates an individual life like our human life. Although, Buddha says that no single karma creates anything, there is one karma that creates a life. The strength and conditions and power of that karma are the measurement of the life strength of that individual. But as for the karmas that run the detailed events of that life, there are zillions, crossing each other. That means some of the positive karmas we create become the karma that gives life, and some of the karmas we create become conditions. Do we have control? No. More or less, we control only the dedications. We dedicate for positive or negative results; we don't dedicate for giving life or for creating conditions. We don't do that. That's why some karmas become conditions and some become the karma that gives you life.

I have said that we can't purposely make different karmas, although we do say that generosity brings wealth, and wealth is a condition to have an enjoyable life. Morality gives you a pure life. Patience brings good looks, majestic looks, makes you Miss America or Mr. America. Like that, some of the karmas do provide conditions. That's how we have to look at it, rather than saying this causes this and that causes that.

Audience: Is there karma that may or may not affect you?

Rimpoche: Yes. You know why? Karma is impermanent; it's a dependent arising. Therefore, negative karma can be neutralized by purification and good karma can be burned by hatred before it gives the result. Some good karmas that we create may not necessarily give us the results because they have been wasted [by hatred].

Audience: When you are doing the purification process that is also generating merit, are you affecting the karma that is creating the conditions or are you affecting the karma that is creating your stream of life?

Rimpoche: That depends. Negative karma gives you a negative life, but the suffering caused by negative karma also purifies the karma that provided the miserable conditions. Purification is purification. Whatever you can focus on mentally, especially if you can remember, makes purification better. When we don't remember, somehow it also works. We are in the habit of saying, "Whatever I did, whatever I remember and what I don't remember in the many lives that I have had" [I pray that it may be purified.] I think that works because of the kindness of earlier masters, which gives us room to purify everything.

Recognition is the recognition of anything that you did wrong. If you remember it clearly, the purification is much, much stronger because regret follows recognition and brings the decision not to repeat. Allen Ginsberg used to insist that we don't say "repentance" but say "non-repeatable," but that is still the four R's. Those are: **recognition**, which brings **regret**. Regret brings makes you **not repeat**. Finally you apply the **remedy**. These are the four R's that Allen found.

Audience: Is karma eternal? In other words, does it ever cease to exist, or is there a state where karma doesn't exist? If so, what creates this?

Rimpoche: My understanding is that one never becomes free of karma. The Buddhas have constant, continuous good things happening to them because that is the constant continuation of positive karma. They no longer have any negative karma at all in their store; so therefore, they become free of suffering. But you don't have to be Buddha. When you reach the third stage of the second path, the stage of patience, from then onwards, you cease to produce the negative karma that brings rebirth in the lower realms. On the third path, the path of seeing, when you see reality and everything, whatever you do becomes uncontaminated, positive karma. After that, everything becomes positive karma.

So, my understanding is that there's no state where there is no karma, but some other lamas just say you're free of karma and blah, blah, blah . . . I don't know what that is. For me, enlightenment is the result of positive karma and suffering is the result of negative karma. So everything is a karmic result. The question is this: Is karma unending? The nature may be different, but is karma unending? I think so.

Every action that we do becomes karma. We never stop acting. There is no time that we cease to take action, unless we become a statue or something. Other than that we have constant action. The constant actions can be positive or negative, producing karma accordingly. That's what happens.

Audience: When you recognize emptiness, is there karma?

Rimpoche: Sure, recognition of emptiness itself creates great positive karma. That's my understanding. That's how I read it, anyway. Some lamas say you can be "free of karma," but I don't know what that means. I have no idea.

Audience: How do you know if purification works?

Rimpoche: I don't think there is true scientific proof. I don't know, but what I was told is that if you are doing a lot of purification, there will be some kind of a sign. Sometimes in the dream state you get a sign of washing—taking a bath, taking a shower, washing off an undesirable color—or undesirable insects or things like that are coming out of your body, or else you are wearing a wonderful, pure, clean, white dress. The last one could also mean something else, though. A pure white clean dress sometimes can be sign of a threat to life, too, so you have to be a little careful

of that. And if you are running around naked, absolutely nude, that's not a good sign.

Audience: If in your awake life you find that certain things are suggesting that things are getting better. . .

Rinpoche: Judging your own mind, how kind you are, works both ways. Actually, the accumulation of merit and purification are working together.

Audience: Generally when you create a karma, there are four things that have to be there, from what I understand . . .

Rinpoche: Not exactly. You make the karma by an action. The karma has characteristics by itself. You don't make the characteristics. The characteristics are there; you don't have to make them.

Audience: What I meant is, there's the intention, there's the action . . .

Rinpoche: Right, right. I didn't go into that detail at all. Yes.

Audience: But my question is: that's what you need to make a complete karma. But what happens when you're just thinking about it? What completes a mental karma?

Rinpoche: The thought itself. Even thinking, "I want to kill that man. I want to shoot him so that he's dead . . . good." That's it. That's complete.

Audience: So when you say "he's dead, good, and I'm happy about it." But if you're not happy about it, if you think about it, but then you regret it, does it do something to neutralize the karma?

Rinpoche: It reduces it. It provides one of the four powers of purification. If you produce the three other powers with that one, you make it a good purification. But if you just regret it but don't provide the three others, it doesn't purify.

Audience: So those four things have to be there to purify, even for a mental karma?

Rinpoche: That is my understanding.

Audience: Rinpoche, you said some years ago that the definition of dharma was to respect your own karma. Could you elaborate?

Rinpoche: Well, I don't know whether it's a definition or not. Respecting your own karma is your dharma, that's for sure. If you don't respect your karma, you could end up producing one of those five limitless negativities. That's why respecting your karma is dharmic work.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. How would it affect my life to remember that "not only is everything transitory, but everything is alterable; everything is changeable. You can do whatever you want to do"?
2. How are the Three Higher Trainings of ethics, concentration, and wisdom

interconnected? What can I do to apply these three to my daily practice and my daily life?

3. How does it make me feel to hear that “I am responsible for myself,” “I am my own leader,” “it is my responsibility,” and “it is all up to me”?
4. According to this teaching, what can I do in a practical way to improve my life right now and in the future?